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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 0135
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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0618
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0434
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE 0142
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 0301
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000374

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: KULOV EXPECTS TO PREVAIL; "PROMISES" NON-VIOLENCE

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. On April 4, Ambassador met with United Front leader and former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Feliks Kulov. Kulov said that his goal is to build a system in which no one individual has unlimited power, as is currently the case. For this, constitutional reform is necessary, and it needs to be done relatively quickly. He outlined a five-step process: peaceful removal of President Bakiyev; a return to the November 2006 constitution; establishment of a coalition government with enlarged powers; passage of a new constitution; early presidential -- and possibly parliamentary -- elections. Despite repeated questions, Kulov did not explain how this would come to pass or why Bakiyev would remove himself from power without a fight. He promised the up coming demonstrations would be peaceful, and left no room for compromise or even conversation with Bakiyev, except in a public setting, which so far Bakiyev has refused. It seems clear that Kulov views the April demonstrations as his one chance, as the people may not come out again to support him. And if he's not successful this time, the government will try to ensure that he won't be in the future either. Finally, Kulov claimed he is not receiving official support from Moscow. END SUMMARY.

READY TO TALK

2. (C) On April 4, Ambassador met with former Prime Minister Kulov, the leader of opposition movement, United Front. Kulov apologized for not meeting sooner, but said that there were two reasons: 1) he had been traveling, and 2) he was not ready to meet; he wanted to have something to

say before he met with Ambassador. Immediately after he was fired, he had spent two weeks listening to the people, and they told him he needed to go into the opposition and lead the country. Kulov added that while he wants to be friends with all countries, the clear priority is the regional neighbors and Russia and China.

BITTERNESS REMAINS

13. (C) Kulov replayed for Ambassador his last days in office, and much bitterness remains. He noted that Bakiyev could have fired him in different ways, but the manner in which Bakiyev let him go had ensured there would be instability in Kyrgyzstan. He had openly warned the President about this. Looking further back, Kulov said that there had been a number of issues on which he had not agreed with the President, including the Uzbek refugee issue, but since the President handled foreign affairs, he had not been able to intervene.

"PROMISE" OF PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS

14. (C) Kulov said that although the United Front is experiencing all sorts of pressure tactics (threatening phone calls to members and their relatives, beating up activists, vandalizing offices, etc.), Kulov "promised" the Ambassador that the April demonstrations would be peaceful. He said he does not intend to behave aggressively, and the United Front will "handle" provocateurs. Unlike Bakiyev, who came to power using questionable tactics in March 2005, the Front will not take over the White House. Kulov said that he understands that if there is violence, the United Front will lose. However, if they act with restraint, they will win. Moreover, with all the individuals that are joining the Front

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and will join the Front, Kulov said the United Front does not need to act with force. He said that local governments are joining the cause, and on April 11, he expects 80% of the police force to do the same. He noted that a number of individuals joined the Front, wanting to make Manas Air Base an issue. Kulov said he didn't argue; he simply said that the Front needed to resolve internal questions such as constitutional reform. Moreover, foreign policy questions should be left to the experts and not be resolved on the streets. Kulov added, however, that the December 6 shooting incident had "ruined Kyrgyz relations with the Base."

RELATIONSHIP WITH MOSCOW?

15. (C) Looking delighted by his own candor, Kulov opened the issue of his relations with Moscow. He said that he travels to Moscow so frequently in order to consult with "old friends that (he) went to school with" and political consultants. He said he is also working with the substantial Kyrgyz diaspora, which is phoning home to Kyrgyzstan and instructing relatives to support Kulov. He laughed that the meeting with Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov was set up by the Ambassador's "good friend Kurmanbek Saliyevich." Bakiyev had called President Putin to complain about former President Akayev's alleged involvement in Kyrgyz politics and about Kulov. Knowing that Kulov and Ivanov had a close relationship, Bakiyev suggested to Putin that the two meet and Ivanov tell Kulov to stop criticizing Bakiyev. The Russians agreed, but Kulov said that Ivanov simply said Russia's policy was one of non-interference, and Russia's view was that any developments should occur peacefully. Kulov concluded that Russian support for his political efforts would be as counter-productive as American support.

THE GAME PLAN

16. (C) Kulov said that his goal is to build a system whereby no one individual has unlimited power, as is currently the case. For this, constitutional reform is necessary and it needs to be done relatively quickly. He outlined a five step process: peaceful removal of Bakiyev; a return to the November 2006 constitution; establishment of a coalition government with enlarged powers; passage of a new constitution; early presidential -- and possibly parliamentary -- elections. Despite repeated questions, Kulov did not explain the mechanism for how this would actually all come to pass and why Bakiyev would remove himself from power without a fight. He simply said that Bakiyev would find himself without allies, and the voters would force parliament to empower the opposition. He commented that it was not clear how long the first two steps would take, but reckoned between two weeks and one and a half months. Kulov reiterated his public statements that he would not meet with Bakiyev in private, because he does not trust him. Bakiyev, he said, constantly changes his position, so Kulov will only meet him in public.

SUPPORT IN THE SOUTH?

17. (C) Kulov stated that in the South, he had asked his supporters not to demonstrate on April 9, but all other oblasts will start demonstrations then. He expected the South would turn out in force on April 11 and 12. When Ambassador said she had just been in the South and had received a clear message that there was no support for the Front or for more demonstrations, Kulov seemed to contradict himself and agree. He said that people are tired and they are

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afraid of pressure; therefore, only the activists will turn out, but others will support the Front in their hearts.

KULOV UNDERSTANDS U.S. POSITION...AND THAT OF THE RUSSIANS AND KAZAKHS TOO

18. (C) Kulov noted that this is the last chance to change the system once and for all. People want reform; they are tired of demonstrations and they want to go on with their lives. However, if they aren't successful now, they won't go out on the streets again. Ambassador shared with Kulov the U.S. position, which she noted was the same as when Kulov led the government: demonstrations and political actions should be legal, constitutional, and peaceful, and both sides needed to display restraint and respect for the rule of law. She said that Kyrgyzstan is at a crossroads. Decisions that are being taken now that will affect the future. Patterns are being set, and it is important that rule of law prevail. If the mob grabs power now, it will do so again. Kulov nodded and said that it why it is important to change the system, so that one person can't grab all the power for himself. Kulov said he understood the U.S. position; it was the same as the Russian and Kazakh positions. No other country could support him at this point, he concluded.

COMMENT

19. (C) It is clear that Kulov is ready to go the distance, in part because he doesn't think he'll have another chance. In his view, people are ready to take to the streets again, because Kulov is now finally in the opposition. Moreover, he said that if systemic change is not pushed through quickly, the government will ensure that it never happens. He claimed one unnamed high-ranking official told him that by September, Front members "will all be dead." So, if it doesn't work this time, that's it, according to Kulov. Far less clear is whether Kulov can pull this off or how he could pull off a peaceful change of power. We also note with interest that, amidst rumors of Russian support for Kulov, PM Atambayev publicly implied that Russian Prime Minister Fradkov's

congratulatory letter to him should be understood as an
expression of support for the Kyrgyz government.
YOVANOVITCH